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ABSTRACT

A study examined information from 107 workplace literacy program descriptions from the United States and drew conclusions about joint partnerships, funding, and flexibility. Most of the program descriptions were found in an extensive search using the ERIC database. The programs described were from 1989 and 1990. Some of the findings were the following: (1) 96 of the 107 programs examined involved 1 or 2 more partners (64 percent involved 2 partners), most commonly a school and a business, and other possibilities were 2 businesses or a school and a literacy organization; (2) funding sources were mentioned in only 33 of the programs, and of these, 30 percent were funded by single-source providers, with 7 of the 33 programs funded only by businesses; (3) the majority of workplace literacy programs had multiple-source funding; (4) the average program cost $1,118 per student; (5) much more funding was spent per employee in workplace literacy programs than was spent per public elementary and secondary school student between 1970 and 1989; (6) about one-third of companies with 100 or more employees provided remedial basic education, although such training was the lowest priority in most companies; and (7) most of the 53 program descriptions that reported on flexibility issues such as open entry/open exit, hours, self-pacing, flexible location, and curriculum claimed flexibility in one or more of these areas, most commonly curriculum and hours. (Contains 33 references.) (KC)

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[Synthesis of 107 Workplace Literacy Programs]

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

This article examines descriptions of 107 workplace literacy programs in the United States for the following characteristics: Joint partnerships, funding and flexibility. An analysis and synthesis provide some perspectives on patterns in workplace literacy organization and practice. To date, no other evidence-driven summary of workplace literacy programs has been available.

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An evidence-driven summary of workplace literacy programs in the United States may not have been done before. This article examines information provided in 107 workplace literacy program descriptions from the United States and draws conclusions about joint partnerships, funding and flexibility. The majority of program descriptions were found from an extensive search using ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center), a computerized data base. More than half of the program descriptions are from 1990, while most of the others come from 1989. Also, one to 22 workplace literacy programs were described per citation.

JOINT PARTNERSHIPS

Of the 107 programs examined, 96 (90 percent) involved two or more partners. Sometimes this was a school and a business, two businesses, or a school and a literacy organization. Two-member ventures were the most pervasive, while three-party partnerships were far less common:

Figure 1: Joint-partnerships

Two parties	69/107 = 64%
Three parties	27/107 = 25%
One party	11/107 = 10%

Only 11 out of 107 programs were provided by a single entity. Examples of this were workplace literacy programs set up by Polaroid, the U.S. Military, Florida Palm Beach Post, individual nursing homes, literacy-career programs, and so forth.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that some of the 107 program descriptions were so brief that the 90 percent calculation of two or more parties may be underestimated. Common sense also tells us that it is difficult for a company or union to operate a literacy program without having outside trainers and support.

Companies with others

Companies working with others represented the most common type of venture, which was 89 out of 96 partnerships, or 93 percent. From the programs examined, the most common two-party partnership appeared to be between companies and schools (community colleges, universities, or public schools) at 26 percent. Company and organization or literacy provider partnerships occurred 22 percent of the time, while company-union ventures were only at 13 percent. (See figure 2.) Examples of "organization" are: private industry councils, chambers of commerce and non-profit literacy programs.

Figure 2: Companies with others

Company and school	25/96 = 26%
Company and organization	21/96 = 22%
Company and union	12/96 = 13%

Schools with others

Schools with others represented the second most common partnership (56 percent), while unions with schools, businesses, and so forth, were less common (35 percent of the 96 partnerships.) When the general term "school" was broken down, 33 percent of the

96 programs involved community colleges, while 19 percent mention public schools, school districts, or schools in general in the descriptions. Seven percent of all descriptions explicitly stated that universities were involved in workplace literacy programs.

The large percentage of community college partnerships could be because community colleges have been active in advertising literacy programs, journeymen's certificates, and associate degrees to local businesses. For instance, the Community College of Rhode Island, concerned with maintaining enrollment, started its first customized training program with machine tool companies in 1982 (Liston,1984). Since then, the college developed programs with other major Rhode Island companies. It also offered basic to advanced math classes for General Dynamics employees and initiated a specialized associate's degree in Machine Processes for interested employees at the boat motor company (Liston, 1986:4-5).

Besides community college activism, schools in general are major workplace literacy partners because of award and funding stipulations. Literacy grants currently financed by the federal government require that state or local educational agencies, colleges, or schools be involved in program operation (House of Representatives, 1991:174).

FUNDING

Single sources:

Funding sources were mentioned in only 33 of the 107 programs. Of these 33 programs, 30 percent were funded by single-source

providers. Seven out of 33 programs (21 percent) were funded solely by businesses, thus making the latter the largest single-source funder. The only other single-source funders were local, state and federal governments. Local and state governments funded 2 programs out of 33 (6 percent), while the federal government funded 1 out of 33 programs (3 percent.)

Multiple sources:

The majority of workplace literacy programs had multiple-source funding. Involvement in funding these 33 programs came mostly from businesses, who have a large stake in increasing the literacy skills of their employees to stay competitive in world markets. In many cases businesses, literacy providers and a branch of the government all provided financial support, but in only a few instances funding percentages per partner were in the program descriptions. Because of these funding overlaps and lack of clear-cut funding descriptions, information is available from only 33 programs.

As indicated in Figure 3 below, many states have taken an active role in funding and organizing workplace literacy programs, such as Florida, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia (Chynoweth, 1989, and Stein, 1989.) Among these states, Virginia appropriated $4.25 million for the enhancement of literacy programs for 1988-1990. As a result of this budget, the relationship of state to federal funds for literacy providers in Virginia went from 0 percent state/100

percent federal, to 51 percent state/49 percent federal. This shift may indicate that state literacy policies could become a driving force in local literacy projects (Chynoweth, 1989:22.)

(Put Figure 3 here.)

Figure 3: Multiple and single-source funding

Businesses	22/33 = 67%
State/local governments *	16/33 = 48%
Federal government	9/33 = 27%
Organizations/literacy providers **	4/33 = 12%
Unions	3/33 = 9%

Notes:

* Of these 16 programs, 5 were schools and community colleges.

** The Rockford Area Literacy Council in Illinois raised money for workplace literacy programs from private sources. Part of these donations came from businesses and individuals, but no breakdowns were given.

Costs per learner

No program descriptions directly provided information on costs per learner. However, the author attempted to calculate outlays for three programs by dividing total program costs by the number of students served. In this manner, it was possible to estimate that the workplace literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL), and General Education Diploma (GED) program for Sheraton Hotel employees cost $1,118 per student (Hawaii University, 1990:14-37). Program funding was $378,000 and number of participants was 338.

The Working Smart program in Los Angeles had a total cost of $560,000 or $933 for each of the 600 students served in ESL and workplace literacy (Los Angeles Unified School District, 1990:23-92). In the third usable description, federal and local governments, community donations and nine Tennessee companies contributed $120,000 for GED and Basic Skills classes for 152 participants, 15 of whom were family members of employees from the nine companies (Westberry, 1990:14-15.) Thus, program costs were between $875 and $789 per person, depending on whether family members were counted in calculations. More detailed cost analysis was not possible. However, Hargroves (1989) estimated that it costs an average of $2,800 per learner for public-funded adult basic education (ABE) programs.

Comparisons to public school financing:

Much more was spent per employee enrolled in one of these four workplace literacy programs than was spent per public elementary and secondary school student between 1970 and 1989. According to the Statistical Abstract of the United States (1990:236), a national average of $757 was spent on each public elementary and secondary school student in 1989. Out of our 51 states in 1989, Alaska spent the most ($1,664 per public elementary and secondary school student), while Arkansas spent the least ($516 per public elementary and secondary school student.) The differences between workplace literacy and public school funding perhaps illustrate that workplace literacy is considered an important area in

education, yet it is impossible to make sweeping generalizations based only on a few usable funding descriptions.

How many companies are investing in basic education?

A 1989 Training issue was dedicated to this and other workplace questions. Out of 3,130 usable responses from all 50 states, Training reported that 32 percent of companies with 100 or more employees provided remedial basic education (31-50). However, remedial basic education ranked last out of 15 types of training provided. Eighty-four percent of the 3,130 firms with 100 employees or more provided management skills/development training to their employees (Training, 1989:50). These figures show us that remedial basic education still may not be a priority for most companies.

The industries which provided the most remedial education were educational services (41 percent) and manufacturers (34 percent) (Training,1989:60). Sectors which offered the least amount of basic remedial education were health (26.5 percent) and business services (25.7 percent).

However, in this analysis and synthesis of 107 workplace literacy programs, manufacturers provided at least 33 workplace literacy programs out of the 107 cited (31 percent.) Some descriptions were too cursory to give accurate breakdowns on types of industries that provided workplace literacy programs and thus 31 percent may be underestimated.

Governments represented 11/107 (10 percent) of workplace literacy programs, seven of which were municipalities (street and utility departments and so forth), two were state governments (transportation and general), one was the U.S. Department of Agriculture for Forest Service employees and the other was the U.S. military. The present study also found health care services represented 10/107 programs (seven of which were nursing homes, two were hospitals and one was a state board of health.)

Out of the 107 programs, some of the least common literacy providers were banks (1/107), nurseries or greenhouses (1/107), and masonry programs (1/107).

FLEXIBILITY

Of the 107 programs, 53 discussed such flexibility issues as open entry/open exit, flexible hours, self-pacing, flexible location and flexible curriculum, i.e., home study, self-selected courses, or more than one curriculum offered, such as General Education Diploma (GED), English as a second language (ESL), or basic education. Only 3 out of 53 programs (6 percent) reported being inflexible in the above areas.

Overlaps

It is important to point out that one program may have several types of flexibility. For instance, Bell Atlantic employees in six states were able to study at home and set their own pace of learning through independent study classes. In addition, they were offered on-site ESL and GED classes (Cooper, 1988:11-12). Thus,

this program was calculated in flexibility percentages for home study, self pacing, open entry/open exit, flexible hours, and on/off site options.

Multi-strand curricula

Most of the programs (77 percent) offered two or more courses, such as GED, ESL, remedial education, or computer training. UAW/Chrysler employees in Delaware and in 40 other Chrysler facilities were allowed to chose from courses in problem solving, robotics, speed reading, public speaking, bible study, career counseling, as well as basic education and GED classes (Cooper, 1988).

Flexible hours

Thirty four percent of the programs reported flexible hours, ranging from drop-in centers, scheduled classes available for late shift and lunch hours, to home study. An example of a drop-in center came from the Sheraton Hotels ESL, GED and basic skills program in Hawaii (Hawaii University, 1990). Employees could come and work in the learning and computing center when they wished and the center was open Monday to Saturday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Learner control

Twenty five percent of the programs which discussed flexibility (13/53) had open entry/ open exit, home study, or self pacing of learning. One example of this was the Planters Peanuts and Suffolk City Schools partnership in Virginia where employees at Planters took on-site classes or worked independently on literacy

improvement at home. Planters also had an open entry/open exit policy for employees who decided to join the program later, or for those who wanted to discontinue their studies.

On- and off-site classes

Three of 53 (or 5.6 percent) reported both on and off site locations, such as the nine Tennessee manufacturers that Westberry (1989) described. Employees at these companies had on-site classes and also met for one-on-one tutoring in churches, libraries, and so forth. On-site/off-site options allow employees who might otherwise be embarrassed about getting help to do so in a neutral environment that is also more private.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of workplace literacy program descriptions sheds some light on the nature of U.S. workplace literacy efforts. The majority of workplace literacy programs appear to be joint ventures, the most common partners tend to be schools and businesses, and the most frequent funder of U.S. workplace literacy programs appears to be business. In addition, this analysis suggests that many and perhaps most of the workplace literacy programs have some degree of built-in program flexibility, the most common of which were multi-strand curricula and flexible hours.

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